



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to High Commissioner on National Minorities Rolf Ekeus

As delivered by Ambassador Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 9, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On behalf of the United States, I would like to welcome the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Ekeus, back to the Permanent Council. It's nice to see you again. We all continue to be grateful for your outstanding work addressing national minority-related issues in OSCE participating States.

We agree with you that interethnic tension very often fuels conflicts in the world today. Who can deny the role that ethnic tension played in contributing to the painful history of the Balkans in the past decade? Unfortunately, simmering ethnic tensions in the Balkans and in other areas in the OSCE region continue to threaten the collective peace and security many enjoy today.

In this context, we very much welcome Ambassador Ekeus' recent focus on the role of police in reducing tensions and improving relations between ethnic groups. We look forward to studying closely the practical guidance on policing in multiethnic societies that he is presenting today.

Multiethnic policing is not only the right thing to do in terms of meeting the democratic commitments we have all made, it is also the smart thing to do. As Ambassador Ekeus has noted in his recommendations, a relationship built on trust and confidence and the rule of law benefits all parties. Minorities benefit from policing that is more attuned to their concerns and more attentive to their needs for personal security and access to justice. Enhanced communication between police and minority communities also clearly benefits the operational effectiveness of the police.

Ultimately, multiethnic policing enhances the stability of the state and its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. We have every confidence that the recommendations Ambassador Ekeus has just introduced will be of great benefit in this respect, and we would like to express our deep thanks to the High Commissioner and his team of experts for their efforts in developing them.

The issue of "new minorities" and integration policies is important as well, and the United States encourages additional thought on these issues. We thank Ambassador Ekeus for commissioning a study in response to the Parliamentary Assembly's resolution calling for the High Commissioner to examine new minority integration policies. Ambassador Ekeus' plan to focus on different integration policies and to compare the integration strategies of "old" and "new" minorities is appropriate.

We would like to thank the High Commissioner for also sharing with the participating States today some of the plans he has for the coming year. We encourage the High Commissioner's continued involvement in assisting governments to develop and implement important legislation as well as the institutional and political framework to promote harmonious interethnic relations. His planned country visits this year should be particularly useful. We also welcome Ambassador Ekeus' plans to take measures to assure that the issue of gender equality is accounted for in the High Commissioner's programs and projects.

I would like to thank High Commissioner Ekeus and his staff for their efforts to protect the rights of national minorities, to promote tolerance, and to encourage social integration. His ability to provide the Council insights from on-the-ground visits is invaluable and we will continue to look to him to warn of potential conflicts in the OSCE area. We reiterate our full support for his valuable work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.